

LT DAN BAND ROCKS NSA

*Story by Art Frith; Photos by David W. Crenshaw
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As the songs of Janice Joplin, Bruce Springsteen and other classic rock groups of the 60s, 70s and 80s filled the air, an estimated audience of more than 2,000 watched and listened as Gary Sinise and The Lt. Dan Band performed at NSA Mid-South Friday night.

Kimo Williams, who plays lead guitar, is one of two Army veterans included in the Lt. Dan Band roster. The other is his wife, Carol, who plays saxophone and flute. Williams grew up in Hawaii, but the Vietnam veteran and professional musician now calls Chicago home. It's the Windy City where he met and became friends with Sinise. "At the time, Gary was doing *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which I wrote the music for," explained Williams. After the show, Sinise told him, "I play the bass guitar. Why don't we get together and jam?" Thinking that this was going to be just another actor who *thinks* he can play an instrument, but really can't, Williams reluctantly invited Sinise over to his house to jam and relax. To his surprise, Williams discovered Sinise really could play. "The audience will find out what I did, that Gary is a phenomenal bass player." With Sinise playing bass, Williams switched back to guitar and from that point on, whenever Sinise was in town, they'd get together to jam. Williams said, "Each time we did, we sounded better."

By the time Sinise was working on the movie *Snake Eyes*, which was filming on location in Montreal, Williams and Sinise had played together five or six times. "Gary called me," said Williams, "and asked me to come up to Montreal and jam with some of the locals there." He did and with Sinise, they walked the streets of the city looking for musicians. Williams continued, "We pulled them in, put a little band together, and did a great wrap party for the cast and crew."

Upon their return to Chicago, Williams and Sinise agreed they sounded better and signed-up for the USO's "handshake tour" in Italy. At this time, the band they'd put together was called "The G&K Classic Rock Band." It was Williams who came up with the idea that they take the band on the road, to which Sinise replied, "Yes. We should do that, Kimo. Let me look into it and make a few calls to the USO." This is where the name of the band became a problem, as Williams explained, "During the handshake tour in Italy, everywhere we went, every single place it was the same. It didn't matter if the person was five or 25 years old, everyone knew 'Lieutenant Dan,' but not this guy Gary Sinise." Williams went on to say, "As soon as we'd walk out on stage we would hear 'Lieutenant Dan, Lieutenant Dan!' Though it seemed silly at the time, Sinise tossed out the idea of calling the group 'The Lt. Dan Classic Rock Band.' Upon returning to the States, Sinise talked with officials about taking the band on the road with the USO.



Chicago-area musician, composer and Vietnam veteran Kimo Williams co-founded The Lt. Dan Band, along with actor Gary Sinise.

Williams said, "Gary called me saying, 'Guess what? We might be able to do this USO tour idea, but we'll have to call ourselves The Lt. Dan Band,'" to which Williams replied, "Let's do it."

As anyone who hears the group knows, Sinise is an outstanding bass player. "I got my first guitar when I was in the fourth grade," said Sinise. Though he played in jazz bands and rock bands throughout his years at Highland Park High School in Highland Park, Ill., and well into his early 20s, Sinise found his music taking a back seat to another love. He started acting during his sophomore year in high school. In 1975, Sinise formed the Steppenwolf Theater Company in Chicago, where he eventually met Williams.

Sinise, who currently stars in the hit CBS drama *CSI: New York*, and The Lt. Dan Band are relative newcomers to the USO show tour scene. Their first official USO show was in 2003 at the Naval Training Center in Great Lakes, Illinois, which served as a warm-up to the band's first overseas tour, which included Diego Garcia, Singapore and Korea.

Nothing seems to slow him down as Sinise balances an extremely busy schedule, dividing his time between his family, his acting/directing career, and appearances with the band. Williams said that his close friend is a driven, committed, and dedicated individual, "Gary can finish a shoot for *CSI: New York* at two in the morning and easily turn around and do a music thing at 2:30."

So why is it, with *CSI: New York* and all of his other stage and screen acting and directing accomplishments, that the *Forrest Gump* character of Lieutenant Dan is what everyone seems to associate him with? Sinise responded, "So many people have seen the movie and recognize me from that part." The movie is now 12 years old and one generation of moviegoers watched it on the big screen. Now, thanks to TV and home video, another generation is growing up with the film.

Sinise's support of service members is deeply rooted in his family. "Two of my wife's brothers are Vietnam veterans," explained Sinise. "Her sister was in the Army for 10-years and her husband was a medic in Vietnam and retired from the Army after 24-years." His work with veterans' groups dates back more than 25-years. "I got involved with Vietnam veterans' groups in the Chicago area in the early 80s. I'm just happy to do what I can to help raise money for the veterans." As American service men and women went off to battle in Iraq and Afghanistan, Sinise wanted to do his part. "When we went to war in 2002, our troops were deployed and I wanted to help. So, I volunteered to do USO shows."

Sinise's involvement with the war in Iraq is not limited to the military. In March 2004, he and author Laura Hillenbrand co-founded a group called "Operation Iraqi Children," a program that enables Americans to send school supply kits to Iraqi children.



Actor, producer, director ... and bass guitarist, Gary Sinise discusses his three loves – music, acting and America's troops.

“I have seen Iraqi kids climbing on our soldiers and hugging them and kissing them,” remembers Sinise, who has accompanied service members to a dilapidated school they were rebuilding. “I have seen their smiling faces and their attempts to say ‘I love you’ in broken English. The folks I saw had hope in their eyes and gratitude in their hearts for what was done for them.”

There’s a great deal of negativity in the news coverage of the war. These stories would have one believe America doesn’t stand behind their men and women in uniform. Sinise knows from first-hand experience that this isn’t true. During the interview, and again at Friday night’s performance, Sinise said, “If you ever wonder if people support the troops, just go on the Internet to americasupportsyou.mil. You’ll see that America does support you!”

NSA Mid-South was the second stop on the band’s current USO bus tour, which started with Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma, and concluding this week with performances at Fort Leonard Wood and Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri. To learn more about The Lt. Dan Band, go to <http://www.ltdanband.com>.

A photo gallery of the band’s NSA Mid-South performance is available on-line at <http://www.nsamidsouth.navy.mil>.